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THE SACK OF TROY IN STESICHORUS AND APOLLODORUS

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ABSTRACT

The idea that Apollodorus' account of the sack of Troy can be used to reconstruct Stesichorus' poem on that subject, put forward in a recent issue of this journal, unfortunately proves overstated.

In a recent important article in this journal Fulvio Beschi argues that Stesichorus' *Sack of Troy* had a profound influence on Apollodorus' account of the sack in the Epitome of his *Biblioteca*.¹ If correct, his argument would have major consequences for our knowledge both of Stesichorus and of the treatment of the sack of Troy in early poetry; it would be a discovery with significant results for our understanding of archaic literature and its transmission, and of mythography under the Roman empire and its sources. Unfortunately, I do not believe that this hypothesis is right, and in this note explain why.

The key points of Beschi's case are as follows. He notes that Apollodorus, like Proclus, is generally thought to have derived his material from the Epic Cycle via a prose compendium of the Hellenistic period (pp. 23–24). He further notes, however, that the accounts given by Proclus and by Apollodorus of the sack of Troy diverge, and as a result cannot both be relying on the same source alone (pp. 25–26). He

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¹ Beschi 2016. For the fragments of Stesichorus' poem see frs. 98–164 in Finglass 2014b; Apollodorus' account can be found in *Epit.* 5, 8–25.

highlights what he believes to be particular similarities between the presentation of the sack in Apollodorus and on the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* (pp. 28–30, 38–45), a work which explicitly cites Stesichorus as its model.² He notes that Stesichorus’ *Geryoneis* probably influenced Apollodorus’ account (p. 33);³ and argues that Stesichorus’ *Sack of Troy*, too, shows similarities with Apollodorus’ version of that myth, and no significant contradictions (pp. 45–7). The upshot of all this is that Stesichorus’ poem, or a putative prose abridgement of that work (p. 30 n. 1), stands revealed as a common source for both the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* and for Apollodorus’ narrative; future editors of the poet will therefore have to take Apollodorus into account (p. 48).

To assess Beschi’s hypothesis, we need to compare the narrative in Apollodorus with what remains of Stesichorus’ *Sack of Troy*. In his article Beschi makes no investigation of the papyrus fragments of that poem, believing that they are too lacunose to have any impact on his thesis one way or the other (p. 45). In fact the fragments offer quite a lot of relevant information. Let us begin with the opening of the work:

⊗	— ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ —	strophe
	x — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ —	
	x — ∪ — ∪ ∪ — x — ∪ — x	
	— ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — x — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ —	

² The *Tabula* is Stes. fr. 105 F.; for an account of its contents see Davies and Finglass 2014, 428–432. That book, published in the UK in December 2014, was not available to Beschi when he wrote his piece, which was completed during 2014.

³ For this point Beschi cites Barrett 2007, but Barrett was partly anticipated by Vürtheim 1919, 21; see Davies and Finglass 2014, 241 with n. 64.

From this text, the result of the combination of four separate bits of papyrus with a quotation fragment, we learn that Athena inspired Epeius to build the Wooden Horse, and that this was narrated at the very start of the poem.⁴ Beschi is unaware of this fragment because for the text of Stesichorus' poetry he relies, reasonably enough, on Davies's edition.⁵ One flaw in that edition is Davies's decision to present what should be a single fragment as if it were three separate fragments, and to make no reference to the view (first expressed in the 1970s) that they should all be united. As a result, Beschi dismisses the reference to Epeius carrying water (lines 18–19 in the fragment above, known to Beschi as a discrete fragment, fr. 200 in Davies 1991) as merely one of several 'tiny details' ('dettagli molto minuti', p. 46) known about Stesichorus' poem, when it actually comes from the narrative at the very beginning of that work.

The opening to Stesichorus' *Sack of Troy* tells against Beschi's thesis in two ways. First, Beschi argues that the events described by Apollodorus as preliminary to the Sack, from Calchas' prophecy onwards, were described in Stesichorus' poem:⁶ that is, the recovery of Philoctetes; the marriage of Deiphobus to Helen; the capture of Helenus by Odysseus; Helenus' revelation that the Greeks could capture Troy if they

⁴ For this fragment see further Finglass 2013 and 2015a, which refer to earlier literature. The brilliant suggestion that this fragment comes from the start of the poem (note the invocation of the Muse) is owed to Kazansky 1976, a piece made accessible to those of us without Russian by Tinnefeld 1980.

⁵ Davies 1991; for a critique of this edition see Finglass 2017a = 2017b. I stress that the fault is not Beschi's own, since he was making use of the most recent complete edition available to him (see n. 2 above); the episode underlines how problematic editions can impede the progress of scholarship.

⁶ Beschi 2016, 37: 'l'*Ilioupersis* stesicorea nella ricostruzione che si propone in questo contributo . . . comprende – oltre alla distruzione vera e propria della città – l'esposizione della complessa serie delle sue premesse (a partire dalle dichiarazioni di Calcante sulla necessità di recuperare le armi di Achille . . .).'

acquired the bones of Pelops, brought Neoptolemus to fight for them, and stole the Palladium; the fulfilling of each of these conditions by the Greeks; the arrival of Eurypylus, and his death at the hands of Neoptolemus. Only then, in Apollodorus' narrative, do we reach the building of the Wooden Horse. But not only is there no evidence for any of these events taking place in Stesichorus' poem, the fact that it begins with the construction of the Horse shows that the narrative of the poem opened at a much later stage in the story than Beschi supposes. It remains possible, of course, that some of these events were nevertheless mentioned in the course of Stesichorus' poem, with the narrative giving details out of strict chronological order. But it is pure speculation to say that any one of these events was mentioned for sure; and pure speculation cubed, or worse, to say that they all were.

Second, in Apollodorus' narrative it is Odysseus who comes up with the idea of the Wooden Horse; he suggests it to Epeius, who fells the timber and constructs the device.⁷ In Stesichorus, we now know, Athena suggests the stratagem to Epeius directly, as also in Proclus' summary of the epic *Little Iliad*. This detail does not help anyone arguing (as Beschi does, p. 34) that Apollodorus' account was deeply influenced by Stesichorus, or that Stesichorus' version of the Sack of Troy is closer to Apollodorus' than to Proclus'. Unaware of the Stesichorean fragment, Beschi suggests that the difference between the accounts in Proclus and Apollodorus in this instance may be more apparent than real, given the close connexion between Athena and Odysseus.⁸ But Apollodorus' account places strong emphasis on the personal agency of Odysseus: he goes to Lemnos and persuades Philoctetes to come to Troy; he captures Helenus; he extricates Neoptolemus from Scyros; he gives Achilles'

⁷ Apollod. *Epit.* 5, 14.

⁸ Beschi 2016, 28 n. 4b).

weapons to Neoptolemus; he enters Troy as a beggar; he steals the Palladium with Helen's aid. Coming up with the idea of the Wooden Horse is one more way in which Odysseus performs the preliminary acts necessary for the sack of Troy; a reader of Apollodorus' account will not infer that his name is being used interchangeably here with Athena's. In Stesichorus, by contrast, Odysseus slips out of the narrative altogether, at least during the creation and transmission of the plan; the stress is on the goddess's compassion for a menial servant toiling on behalf of the Greek kings, who thanks to her intervention is unexpectedly permitted to win glory. Apollodorus emphasises Odysseus' particular contribution to the Greek cause, Stesichorus the generosity of a goddess to a single lowly soldier; the content and ethos of the two texts are diametrically opposed.

This is not the only way in which the papyrus fragments contradict the hypothesis of influence. In Apollodorus, the Trojans take the horse into the city, set it beside Priam's palace, and deliberate there what to do with it.⁹ In Stesichorus, on the other hand, the debate takes place outside the city. It is narrated in the lacunose fr. 103, from where the following extract is taken:

πρὸς ναὸν ἐς ἄκρ[όπο]λ[ι]ν ῥηϊδοντες [~—~—
 Τρῶες πολέες τ' ἐπ[ί]κ[ου]ροι
 35 ἔλθετε μη[δ]ὲ λόγ[ο]ις π[ε]ιθώμεθ' ὅπως π[~—~—x
 τονδεκα[...]ον[ι] []
 ἄγνὸν ἄ[γαλ]μα [~—].. αὐτεῖ καται .—
 σχ]ύνωμε[ν ἀ]εῖκ[ε]λ[ι]ώ_ς
 x]νιν δὲ [—x—~]. ἄζώμεσθ' ἀνὰ[ς] cαc

⁹ Apollod. *Epit.* 5, 16.

rushing to the temple on the acropolis . . . Trojans and their numerous allies come,
and let us not obey the arguments to . . . destroy shamefully here this . . ., a holy
image, and let us respect . . . of the Lady

Stesichorus, *Sack of Troy* fr. 103, 33–39 F.

The speaker is encouraging the Trojans to bring the Horse into the city, to a temple on the acropolis, and not to destroy it where it stands. It seems that the Horse has not been moved yet; the debate is taking place immediately after its discovery, and moving it into the city, and destroying it, are presented as mutually exclusive alternatives. Apollodorus' version is paralleled by the accounts in the *Odyssey* and (probably) the epic *Sack of Troy*;¹⁰ but Stesichorus directly contradicts that version. This does not help a hypothesis positing that Stesichorus had a special influence on Apollodorus' account.

It is possible that another papyrus fragment might provide yet more evidence against the hypothesis:

—υυ—υυ—] δ' ἐπώμοσε σεμ[υυ—x
—ϖ—υυ—x]
—υυ—υυ—x] ἐς θ', ἐγὼν δ' αὖ
—υυ—υυ—]
5 x—υ—x—υ—x—] γον εἶμεν
x—υυ—υυ—ϖ—]..
x—υυ—]... εαγυ
◀=====▶

¹⁰ See Davies and Finglass 2014, on fr. 103, 33; Finglass 2015b, 352.

—υυ—υυ—] φάος ἀελίου [str.

x—υυ—υυ—]

10 x—Ϟ—υυ—x]α . [κ]ατ' αἶσαν [

],[...εψ[

swore a false oath by . . . you . . . , but I . . . to be . . . the light of the sun . . . in due
measure

Stesichorus, *Sack of Troy* fr. 104 F.

The context of this fragment is uncertain. But it is a plausible view that it comes from a speech from Sinon, who would be lying to the Trojans about the purpose of the Horse.¹¹ If that view is correct, that would be another inconsistency between Stesichorus' poem and Apollodorus' narrative: for there Sinon has a different role, holding up firebrands to guide the Greek fleet from Tenedos back to Troy.¹²

Thus the papyrus fragments; but the other fragments offer no more support to Beschi's case. So in Apollodorus, there are fifty warriors in the Horse; Stesichorus has twice as many.¹³ Beschi attempts to get around this divergence by noting that the source of the Stesichorean fragment, Eustathius, does not specify which Stesichorean poem he is referring to. True, it is conceivable that Eustathius is referring to a different poem which happened not only to mention the Horse itself, but to specify the precise number of warriors within it. But this seems much less likely than supposing that the fragment containing a key detail about the Wooden Horse appeared in the

¹¹ Thus West 1969, 139; see further Davies and Finglass 2014, 427.

¹² Apollod. *Epit.* 5, 19.

¹³ Apollod. *Epit.* 5, 14; Stes. fr. 102 F.

poem which began with the construction of that Horse, and which indeed had the alternative title (*Trojan?*) *Horse*.¹⁴

In Apollodorus, Hecuba is given as a slave to Odysseus (although Apollodorus adds that ‘some say’ that she was assigned to Helenus, who took her to the Chersonese, where she was turned into a bitch and buried by Helenus); whereas in Stesichorus, she is translated by Apollo to Lycia.¹⁵ Beschi rightly notes (p. 46) that the two accounts are, strictly speaking, not mutually exclusive: Apollo’s intervention could have taken place after Hecuba’s assignation to Odysseus. Nevertheless, this was (from Beschi’s perspective) a missed opportunity. Hecuba’s journey is a particularly distinctive aspect of Stesichorus’ narrative, where the poet diverges from the regular version involving canine metamorphosis;¹⁶ and if Apollodorus had used the same version as Stesichorus, that would have been powerful testimony in favour of the idea that Stesichorus was his source. As for Apollodorus’ alternative version, in which Hecuba is taken by Helenus and turned into a bitch, that actively contradicts Stesichorus’ account. If Apollodorus really is deeply influenced by Stesichorus, it is strange that he mentions two versions of this aspect of the story neither of which coincides with Stesichorus’ poem, and one of which is definitely inconsistent with it.

Beschi adds (p. 47) that even if Apollodorus’ summary did differ from Stesichorus’ *Sack of Troy* in the matter of the number of warriors in the Horse, or the eventual fate of Hecuba, that would not contradict his thesis; rather, it would provide evidence for Apollodorus’ use of more than one source. A work may indeed differ from its main source; one difference, even several, may not be enough to defeat a

¹⁴ Stes. fr. 99 F., on which see Davies and Finglass 2014, 414.

¹⁵ Apollod. *Epit.* 5, 24; Stes. fr. 109 F.

¹⁶ For that regular version of the myth see Davies and Finglass 2014, 440.

hypothesis of influence. But for us to put forward such a hypothesis convincingly in the first place, we would need to identify at least some similarities – perhaps even just one – between the two works that could not reasonably be explained except by means of such a hypothesis. So far, however, we have not found any such similarity, and quite a few significant differences.

A last major difference can be found in the recovery of Helen. In Stesichorus, the Greeks are about to stone Helen, when she disrobes, checking their assault by the display of her beauty.¹⁷ Apollodorus, by contrast, merely states that Menelaus killed Deiphobus and led Helen to the ships;¹⁸ he makes no reference to any attempt by Menelaus to kill Helen at the time, or to any subsequent near-lynching. Beschi (pp. 43–44) tries to deal with the contradiction by pointing out that the source of the Stesichorean fragment (the scholia to Euripides) does not specify that the event in question took place in Stesichorus' *Sack of Troy*, and claiming that his *Oresteia* is a more likely home. True, it is not certain that this fragment comes from the *Sack of Troy*. But that is by some way the most probable hypothesis, given that this poem dealt with the sack of Troy and its aftermath, which is the most likely setting for an attempted stoning of Helen.¹⁹ To sustain his overall hypothesis Beschi is forced to take refuge in a supposition that, while not impossible, is very unattractive.

Despite all these differences, the possibility even now remains that Stesichorus' poem nevertheless had a significant impact on Apollodorus' account. For that possibility to be plausible, we would have to identify some similarities between the two works, distinctive similarities that go beyond the kind of resemblances that

¹⁷ Stes. fr. 106 F. For this episode see Finglass 2017c.

¹⁸ Apollod. *Epit.* 5, 22.

¹⁹ Thus Davies and Finglass 2014, 436–7.

we would expect in almost any accounts of the sack. The following events in Apollodorus' narrative are depicted on the *Tabula Iliaca Capitolina* (fr. 105 F.) and thus likely to have featured in Stesichorus' poem, which the *Tabula* explicitly claims as its source: the lesser Ajax's rape of Cassandra; Neoptolemus' killing of Priam; the rescue of Aethra by Demophon and Acamas; the casting of Astyanax from the battlements;²⁰ Polyxena's sacrifice at Achilles' tomb; Aeneas' escape from the city, carrying his father. But there is nothing remarkable about these coincidences. All these incidents are standard elements of the sack of Troy; all are found in the epic *Sack of Troy*, where the only clear difference is that Aeneas escapes before the sack takes place, and that is hardly a major divergence. Nor are similarities with Apollodorus' narrative to be found among the other fragments of Stesichorus' poem.

In short, there is not a single significant point of similarity between Stesichorus and Apollodorus in their descriptions of the sack of Troy, whereas there are up to half a dozen significant differences. There is therefore no positive reason to hypothesise that Apollodorus' account was influenced by Stesichorus; and a number of reasons to hypothesise that Apollodorus was influenced by different sources altogether. Scholars engaged in *Quellenforschung* should always proceed, in the words of Glenn Most, 'with caution and doubt, and with the painful awareness that they are building not upon solid rock, but upon a swamp.'²¹ I fear that anyone who adopts the view that Apollodorus' narrative can be used to reconstruct Stesichorus' poem will not be basing their work on reliable foundations.

²⁰ Astyanax's death is also attested in Stes. fr. 107 F.

²¹ Most 2014, 216, from a fascinating analysis of how hunting for sources became a dominant part of classical scholarship in the nineteenth century.

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